

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 ORM-02 DHA-02 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 /090 W

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R 260820Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6505

INFO V/USMISSION GENEVA 2238

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 32312

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SREF, CB, TH

SUBJ: FORCED REPATRIATION OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES

REF: BANGKOK A-266 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: THE RTG TURNED 26 CAMBODIAN REFUGEES OVER TO CAMBODIAN AUTHORITIES NOVEMBER 23, AND IT IS REPORTED THAT THEY WERE EXECUTED SHORTLY AFTERWARD. UNHCR MADE STRONG DEMANDS CONCERNING THIS FORCED REPATRIATION TO MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING TO VOLAG REPS BASED IN ARANYAPRATHET, 26 CAMBODIAN REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED THERE IN LATE OCTOBER WERE FORCIBLY SENT BACK ACROSS THE BORDER INTO POIPET ON NOVEMBER 23, THE THAI DECIDING THAT THEY WERE KC INFILTRATORS. THEY WERE TAKEN OUT OF ARANYA-PRATHET REFUGEE CAMP, BLINDFOLDED, WITH HANDS BOUND, AND DELIVERED, CRYING, TO THE KC. EARLY NOVEMBER 25, A TAXI DRIVER AT ARANYAPRATHET
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TOLD ONE OF THE VOLAG REPS THAT THE KC BEHEADED THE 26 THE

PRECEDING DAY.

2. TO ITS GREAT CREDIT, UNHCR ACTED IMMEDIATELY UPON LEARNING OF THE REPORT FROM ITS OWN, DIFFERENT SOURCE. ITS REPRESENTATIVE, CESAR BERTA, INFORMED GENEVA BY PHONE NOVEMBER 24 DURING UNHCR LUNCHEON HOSTED IN HONOR OF THAI DELEGATION HEADED BY MOI DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY DAMRONG SUNTHONSARATHUN. DAMRONG HAD BEEN MAKING USUAL NOISES ABOUT THAILAND'S HUMANITARIAN POLICIES AND REAFFIRMING PRINCIPLE OF ASYLUM. ALTHOUGH HE SAID HE KNEW NOTHING OF THIS CASE, HE PROMISED TO LOOK INTO IT UPON HIS RETURN TO BANGKOK.

3. MORE IMPORTANTLY, BERTA MET NOVEMBER 25 WITH A HIGH MFA OFFICIAL TO MAKE STRONG PROTEST IN THIS CASE AND TO INQUIRE AS TO WHETHER THIS HERALDS THE START OF A NEW RTG POLICY TOWARD REFUGEES. HE RECEIVED NO REAL ANSWER TO LATTER QUESTION. BERTA FOUND MFA OFFICIAL ELUSIVE, STATING THAT THE THAI MILITARY HAD INFORMED IT THAT THESE PEOPLE WERE FOUND CARRYING MAPS OF CAMBODIAN MINEFIELDS AND OTHER, UNSPECIFIED DOCUMENTS, UPON THEIR ARRIVAL. THEN, THE OFFICIAL CONFIRMED THAT THE REPATRIATION OF THE 26 HAD BEEN DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE CAMBODIAN AND THAI LIAISON OFFICES, WITH THE THAI LIAISON CHIEF UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO OBTAIN ASSURANCES FOR THE SAFETY OF THE 26 ONCE THEY RETURNED TO CAMBODIA. PRESUMABLY, THE THAI RECEIVED SATISFACTION. BERTA SAID HE TOLD THE MFA OFFICIAL AT THIS POINT THAT HE BELIEVED THE 26 WERE ALREADY DEAD, TO WHICH THE OFFICIAL REPLIED THAT THE QUESTION WAS ONE OF NATIONAL SECURITY, NOTING, HOWEVER, THAT THE 26 NEVER ADMITTED TO HAVING ANY CONNECTION WITH THE KC.

4. MFA OFFICIAL PROMISED TO INFORM FOREIGN MINISTER UPADIT PACHARIYANKUN IMMEDIATELY OF BERTA'S DEMARCHE. IN TURN, BERTA INFORMED THE HIGH COMMISSIONER ABOUT THE CONVERSATION AND HIS VIEW THAT THE ACTION REPRESENTS A VERY SERIOUS BREACH OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NO FORCED REPATRIATION, TO WHICH THE RTG HAS PLEDGED ITSELF. BERTA IS AWAITING FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS. HE ALSO EXPECTS RTG TO MAKE ADDITIONAL EFFORTS TO EXPLAIN ITS ACTION TO UNHCR, AND HE PROMISED TO KEEP EMBASSY INFORMED. PRIVATELY, BERTA SAID THIS INCIDENT WAS "VERY, VERY BAD" AND ADMITTED TO BEING CONCERNED ABOUT ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TREND OF FUTURE THAI POLICY TOWARD THE REFUGEES.

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5. LIKE BERTA, EMBASSY DOES NOT KNOW WHETHER CONCLUSION WARRANTED THAT THIS IS FIRST ONE OF SIMILAR, FORCED REPATRIATIONS IN THE FUTURE. IN ANY CASE, IT IS A SERIOUS MATTER.

6. EMBOFF HAD MET AND DEBRIEFED THE 26 SHORTLY AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL IN ARNAYAPRATHET. ALL EVIDENCE, INCLUDING PHYSICAL CONDITION AND STORIES THEY TOLD, LED TO CONCLUSION THAT THEY WERE LEGITIMATE REFUGEES. AS REPORTED IN REFAIR, SOMEONE ELSE AT THE

CAMP WHISPERED THAT KC FRIENDS OR RELATIVES HAD TIPPED OFF THE GROUP THAT KC HAD JUST UNCOVERED THE IDENTITIES OF ITS MEMBERS, LARGE MAJORITY OF WHOM WERE FORMER LOW-RANKING FANK SOLDIERS, AND WERE PREPARING TO EXECUTE THEM. EMBOFF RECALLS THAT SAME SOURCE SAID KC INDICATED TO THEM THE SAFEST ROUTE BY WHICH TO LEAVE, WHICH COULD EXPLAIN THE MAP OF THE MINED AREAS. THAI ARE SOMETIMES QUICK TO JUMP TO CONCLUSION THAT A REFUGEE IS A COMMUNIST INFILTRATOR OR TO USE THIS LABEL AS CONVENIENT EXCUSE FOR INCARCERATING SOMEONE. IT IS EXTREMELY UNFORTUNATE THAT THEY DECIDED TO GO ONE STEP FURTHER IN THIS CASE AND TURN OVER TO CAMBODIA AUTHORITIES PEOPLE WHO, WHETHER GUILTY OR NOT, ARE MOST LIKELY NO LONGER AMONG THE LIVING. THERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY MANY AMONG THE REMAINING OFFICIALLY-LISTED 11,060 CAMBODIAN REFUGEES IN THAILAND WHO ARE INCREASINGLY UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT THEIR OWN SITUATION HERE.

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